

They were already there during the Carboniferous period,
they were there during the Triassic and Permian;
they have known the stirrings of the first mammal,
and they will know the agonized cries of the last.

-Michel Houellebecq

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H.P. Lovecraft:
The Disjunction in Being

Fabián Ludueña

Translated and with an essay by
Alejandro de Acosta

SC  SM

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Overture

Philosophy is presently in a period of epochal caesura. It is not in the least clear if it will be able to survive as an authentic *form of life* beyond (despite) its position as an organized knowledge in the academic *cursus*. Its position in the world of knowledges is more fragile than ever; and it must be noted that the questioning of its own capacities came from philosophy itself, making it perhaps the sole *episteme* to have invested considerable effort into its own self-destruction. In this sense, philosophy is the only anthropotechnology that, after existing for thousands of years, has had the courage or the insolent audacity (as the reader prefers) of positing its own annihilation as a real possibility, from undermining its capacities of transmissibility, to radical questioning of its pretensions to truth, and finally to challenges concerning its possibilities of becoming an initiatic experience, an ethical discipline of the *logos*.

This is not the place to elucidate the urgent question of whether philosophy will survive the post-bureaucratic Organization (reticulated, state, para-state, non-state) of the new planetary order, or if, at the end of its days, it will become the peripheral business of a highly trained group of elite functionaries of some *office* dedicated to the liturgy of the past. Despite everything, there are good reasons to think that it is time for philosophy to put an end to its historical cycle (we should attend to the insistence with which philosophy itself has demanded it). Nevertheless, some obstinate people still think that there might be a *last* chance. In all truth, philosophers are already extinct from the face of the earth. Though it is not a recent extinction, no one seems to have actually noticed the fact (except, of course, a few lucid but neglected minds who have made this point at various historical moments). The death of the last philosopher happened many centuries ago.

I will not proceed here to a useless list of dates and names. I will simply say that philosophers actually ceased to exist when

the schools that made them possible disappeared. The effacement of philosophers is not equivalent, however, to the end of philosophy. In fact, philosophy has done just fine without philosophers on many occasions. Philosophy as *theoria* has found singularities in which to incarnate itself across the many centuries of human history. However, there is no authentic philosophy without schools, without transmissibility, without an *ethos* that nourishes *theoria* and also allows access to it. In all, philosophy can quite well figure out how to inject itself into different kinds of theorists (including those solitary beings who, in various times, decided in a heroic gesture to call themselves philosophers—though in an extremely personal and individual capacity).

Up until now, philosophy has been perfectly able to survive the extinction of philosophers (will it be able to continue doing so in the future?), but the experience of philosophy as form of life ended with the closing of the last school of the past. *No one can properly be a philosopher in an individual capacity.* Though one can call oneself a philosopher in this way, historically and conceptually it will be a meaningless denomination. The *conditio sine qua non* of the philosopher's existence is a binary form: it requires a master and a disciple, and this is the embryonic form of the school, which is for many reasons the only means of sustaining a philosophical life. However, all of this does not mean that a philosopher cannot be part of a diffuse fraternity of hermits or of anomic beings, such as the exponents of Cynicism. But the school, which is also one of the forms par excellence of the rejection of human *societas* and its rituals, is maintained through a textual tradition, in an *orthopraxis* that ties together geographically and temporally distant individuals. The school does not respect (or at least is not guided by) the laws of any *polis*, or the customs of any human community (existing or to come); it is, by definition, *asocial*.

A school is not a community, nor is it an alternative society: in its pursuit of theoretical contemplation, it is one of the most extreme and mercilessly demanding forms of the discipline of the affects. The logical form of a philosophical school is antithetical to all social gregariousness; otherwise, it would fail to accomplish its goal. The topology of a philosophical school is

irreducible to any social form, past or to come; its geometry escapes everything the human species has thought and lived as forms of *associativity*. There are certainly other forms of existence that are close to it, and even share aims and techniques with philosophy. Philosophy has continually drawn close to them and influenced them, without ever confusing itself with these other experiences (such as the ascetic life).¹

Philosophers, then, have not existed for centuries, and now philosophy itself seems close to exhausting its power of phagocytizing individualities who can speak phantasmatically in its name, or truly take into account the constitutive *de-lirare* of thought. The omnipresence of the planetary bureaucratic Organization renders the number of these singularities increasingly smaller. In this sense, there is no better or worse social organization for philosophy: society itself is its negation. Politics is of interest for philosophy but philosophy must overstep it to constitute itself. That is why no revolutionary promise, no democracy to come, no messianic temporality can guarantee a future for philosophy. Strictly speaking, we will see if philosophy can still find interstices for itself (ultimately, this is its problem, not ours). On the other hand, if at some point, some members of the human race revive the absurd goal of really (and not representatively) sculpting themselves as philosophers, they will have to contend once more with the logic of the school-form (the substantial properties of which indeed transcend all its historical actualizations, which are always contingent).

In our time without philosophers, there are nevertheless agents of philosophy teeming in different corners of the planet, proposing new ways of challenging *Homo sapiens* and its organizational gregariousness. These people, many of them young, have been taken by the idea that, in each period, philosophy needs a new settling of accounts with what we today call literature. They are right. When philosophy flourishes, it does so either against

¹ I will leave the problem of explicating the logical form of a school of philosophy, as distinct from other sorts of human discipline or association, to a future work. This task is enormous and beyond the purposes of the present essay.

literature, or by taking literature as a privileged ally. Most of the time it has done so, however, by colonizing literary knowledge, phagocytizing it for its own benefit and at its own risk. This should not be surprising. Philosophy is not a peaceful knowledge; it has never been and it never will be. In every truly philosophical epoch we can discern a tension between philosophy and literature. In terms of recent temporal periods, for example, German philosophy exalted the value of Hölderlin as a summit of thinking; French philosophy, for its part, was able to restore writers such as Blanchot or Bataille to the most eminent ranks of transgressive speculation.

However, these authors no longer necessarily speak the language of our time², a time as sinister as any other but never so overwhelmingly *out of joint*.^{*} From al-Qāhirah, an American thinker has dared to proclaim that none other than H.P. Lovecraft would be the Hölderlin who would correspond to the current spirit of philosophy.³ Taken as a general statement, we are fully in agreement, but if and only if we limit its reach to the following proposition: H.P. Lovecraft is one of the writers who give supreme expression to the *universe* in which any philosophical aspiration must be situated, the hostile presence of which challenges any philosophical school that could, some day, come to constitute itself.

In other words, unlike Harman, my aim is not to use Lovecraft as the literary illustration of a philosophical system (for example, that of object-oriented philosophy). On the contrary, I think that Lovecraft, like all literature, is irreducible to philosophy and can never be its expression. The inverse is equally true. However, Lovecraft's literature describes or traces the *horizon* against which all current philosophizing must test itself if it aspires to *remain in the existence of thought*. That is why I will not take up Lovecraft's writings as a way of understanding, for example, the spectrology I attempt to develop in other writings, but rather

² Which is not the same as claiming (let us avoid the malice of interpreters) that these authors have nothing to *say to us*.

^{*} In English in original — T.N.

³ Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*.

the opposite: I will consider them as the most conspicuous attempt to define the uncomfortable space in which *any* thinking must ultimately try and place itself. I mean any attempt to theorize, not any one theory in particular. H.P. Lovecraft is simply the one who has described and analyzed the world that all theory must confront. Therefore it is no longer possible to continue developing theory (of whatever sort) without taking into account the key points of Lovecraft's challenge to contemporary thought.

I certainly do not pretend to exhaustiveness in describing the Lovecraftian vision. Such an aspiration would be unproductive as well as impossible. So I will simply take into account those traits that are important to the work to be done here. To do so (it is worthwhile to say so from the outset) I take my distance from any perspective proper to literary criticism since, quite simply, this field has amply responded to the desire for philological erudition on Lovecraft (although there is still far to go from this perspective as well). In fact, Lovecraft's Oeuvre was only properly constituted as such after the death of its author, thanks to the efforts of August Derleth, among others. Today a great variety of writings make up this Oeuvre, which has still yet to be published in its entirety: stories by Lovecraft, an impressive collection of poetry, an extensive correspondence, stories signed by various authors not written but corrected by Lovecraft (sometimes to the point of being rewritten), texts written collaboratively (for example with Kenneth Sterling and Robert Barlow) and *finally*, the author's tremendous non-fiction output (which ranges from philosophical essays to brief newspaper articles).

Finally? Indeed, is it possible to so clearly establish the limits of Lovecraft's Oeuvre without paying the price of a more or less arbitrary philological decision, founded solely on a modern criterion of authenticity—which was also alien to Lovecraft himself? What about the texts that in one way or another continue, gloss, or parody Lovecraft's works? Based on fragments left behind by the writer from Providence, his disciple Derleth was able to construct entire stories. Others have continued the development of the *themes* and *characters* of his stories, what has come to

be called his *mythology*. Others yet have published an entire apocryphal literature. What are we to do with all of these texts? Lovecraftian philology, in the overwhelming majority of cases, has been classically modern and as such essentially anti-Lovecraftian. It has sought to eliminate the criterion of writing and transmissibility proper to Lovecraftian mythology and its very methodology of writing to proceed according to the idea of "authorial authenticity."

Lovecraft's *fandom** has been much wiser and much more historically loyal to the master's gesture. It has taken hold of the entire mass of writings as one ensemble: the Oeuvre and its gloss, the *Scripta* and its apocrypha, aware that Lovecraft's greatest achievement and his greatest insolence was the creation of a *mythology* that completely undid the meaning of the author-function. Lovecraft was a *Lover** of the *crafty**, an insidious inhabitant of dark Providence whose final aim was not to produce an Oeuvre (he himself was conscious of his failure at this; that is why the posthumous "success" belongs not to him but to those who assembled the Oeuvre). Lovecraft's intent, at once deranged and ingenious, was to revive *Myth* in the twentieth century. So let us understand this well: Lovecraft's specific contribution was not so much the creation of a specific (and also accidental) mythology but rather a fundamental provocation. In the age of technology, he called for the overpowering forces enclosed in what we call mythology, forces that define the possibilities and limits of *Homo sapiens*, to *awaken*—once and for all.

Ultimately, from a certain perspective, we can place Lovecraft well beyond the accomplishments of specialists in mythology. On one hand, mythological science already acknowledged that myth was born from the depths of terror (*la terreur*), but only so as to "give birth to all those marvelous stories of which the mythological treasure is composed".⁴ On the other hand, this nascent science understood that the contemporary mythologist

* In English in original —T.N.

⁴ "La terreur [among other affects] a donné naissance à tous ces récits merveilleux dont s'est composé le trésor mythologique" (Paul Decharme, *Mythologie de la Grèce Antique*, xxi).

lived in a completely different world than the one studied in Antiquity: modern humans live "as one of the myriads of wandering stars" in an infinite universe.⁵ However, they also acknowledged the need to recover the exhortation of the Oracle at Delphi: to know oneself. On this issue, mythology could come together with history, and the limited self-knowledge of the ancients could now be expanded to the historical knowledge of *humanity* as a species racked with temporality.

Closer to our times, one of the most brilliant ethnographers of the twentieth century avowed: "the world began without man and will end without him". That is why, in the masterpiece called *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss also said that the destiny of mythology has in some ways also been closed off for contemporary humanity: "Goodbye savages! Goodbye voyages!" This nostalgic milestone at the end of the book is also the recognition of the exhaustion of the Western mythological heritage at the gates of the technological era, sealed with the constitution of One world, completely closed, fully known and without "savages" to turn to so as to hold on to the movement of myth.⁶

Nothing could be farther from Lovecraft than this *Stimmung* somewhere between exultation and nostalgia that has permeated mythological science since its origins. To the terror of the mythologists, Lovecraft opposes a new category, *horror*, which blocks any possibility of enchantment or marveling before myth. To the Delphic imperative of the mythologist-*cum*-archeologist of the historical values of the Western world, Lovecraft opposes a new mythological heritage that not only does not generate any knowledge of humanity but is also the gateway to its annihilation. But the nostalgic pessimism of an ethnographer such as Lévi-Strauss is also impossible in Lovecraft's world: the final agony of humanity will be but the confirmation of its initial un-

⁵ "[The human soul's] nature stands before our mind in quite a different light since man has been taught to know and feel himself as a member of one great family—as one of the myriads of wandering stars, all governed by the same laws" (Max Müller, *Comparative Mythology*, 6).

⁶ *Tristes Tropiques*, 413-414 / *Tristes Tropiques* (French ed.), 494. [I have modified the translation of Lévi-Strauss' famous "Adieu sauvages! Adieu voyages!" to accord with FL's rendering. — T.N.]

sustainability, and its suffering decline but a consequence of its unnecessary advent. That is why, in Lovecraft, the end of humanity does not coincide, as in Lévi-Strauss, with the end of myth and of savages. Quite the contrary: the end of humanity is the transcendental condition for the emergence of true mythology.

Humanity is the greatest obstacle for the new Mythos: only when humanity has finally quit the surface of the planet will the forces that underlie myth be able to occupy the place for which they were always destined. In this sense, Lovecraft is the vessel of an *arche-mythology* which is, at the same time, a *post-mythology*: the mythology that comes after the death of the last human myth. From this perspective, Lovecraftian myth draws the map of the contemporary world; although he is not the only author of his generation to have done so, he was definitely the one to most keenly set out a Mythos compatible with modern science. Only a completely *horrific* and unexpectedly novel mythological form could rise to the height of contemporary discourses and defy the knowledge of science and the humanities, subverting them on their own terms.

Therefore, to be Lovecraftian we have to admit a central and defining axiom about this writer: *Rather than a man of letters, Lovecraft is the greatest mythographer of the twentieth century.* And mythology, in this sense, has no irrevocable authorship; the words it sets out are not only not one's own, but essentially destined to every imaginable extension. That is why, when I refer to certain of his texts (what are usually called his "great tales") I want to this to be understood solely as an attempt to work through the oldest layers of the myth and not as yet another attempt to designate Lovecraft's legitimate *corpus*. The same goes for the non-fiction texts and the writings of the commentators and continuers.

Thus in these pages the reader will not find any contribution to Lovecraft's biography⁷, nor a bibliographic-literary study

⁷ One important step in establishing Lovecraft's "biography" (with the considerable theoretical and practical difficulties that such an attempt brings with it) was the book by L. Sprague de Camp: *Lovecraft: A Biography*. Today, the neces-

on his output.⁸ Even so, it is worth mentioning that the best "joint" work on the Oeuvre is still—for its intensity, for its shameless partiality, and for its audacity—the book dedicated to the writer from Providence by Michel Houellebecq.⁹ As is known, and as often occurs, the early phase of Lovecraft's literary posterity was threatened with excommunication by a powerful writer and literary critic who, with an incandescent lack of literary and human tact, condemned Lovecraft as an *homme manqué*, a failed author.¹⁰ Ultimately, specialized criticism, even now that it is dedicated to praising Lovecraft, has not abandoned Wilson's basic point of view inasmuch as it maintains that we are faced here with a *writer*. He could certainly have been a man of letters; but Lovecraft's truly rare accomplishment was to throw the distraught minds of his time and of future generations into the nightmare of life in a universe in which humanity no longer has a place or a meaning. The time of the new Mythos is, precisely, non-anthropomorphic, and its force cannot be silenced once it has been invoked.

sary reference is S.T. Joshi's biography *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life* (the enlarged edition is now called *I am Providence: The Lives and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*), which should be read in tandem with the study by the same author: *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West*.

⁸ For a sense of the reaches of the Lovecraftian bibliography (built up, however, on the basis of an occasionally questionable philology), cf. S.T. Joshi, *H.P. Lovecraft and Lovecraft Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography*. Also greatly useful is Joshi's *H.P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism*.

⁹ Michel Houellebecq, *H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*.

¹⁰ I am, of course, referring to the well-known article by Edmund Wilson, "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous" (written in 1945). See especially 288: "The only real horror in most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art. Lovecraft was not a good writer. The fact that his verbose and undistinguished style has been compared to Poe's is only one of the many sad signs that nobody any more pays any real attention to writing."

Chapter One

Political Geology, or the Secret Cartography of the *Dominium Mundi*

Philosophia facta est quae philologia fuit

In his works, Lovecraft assembles the elements of an esoteric sacred geography that completely overruns the boundaries of planet Earth, superimposing itself onto the maps drawn up by the most prudent of experts. His fantastic worlds range from some moon of Jupiter to Paleocenic Antarctica, passing through the Plateau of Leng, pre-Incan lands, fabled Valusia and the lands of the prehuman Hyperboreans, worshippers of Tsathougg—to mention but a few. Now, I have postulated that one of the decisive aspects of the Lovecraftian gesture is its rehabilitation of Myth in the twentieth century. In fact, the destruction of a mythology for the purposes of the implantation of another has taken place several times throughout human history. But in terms of the West, the last great event of this sort was probably the Christian polemic against the old religion, producing a true destruction of the old pagan divinities (and accompanied by no small amount of absorption).

In a stunning passage Tertullian came to write: "I am unwilling to review your rituals. I say nothing of your ways as to sacrifice, in offering the worn out, the decaying, the scabrous; nor how you lop from the choice and sound all that is useless—heads and hoofs—which at home you would have destined for the slaves or the dogs."¹¹ Along the same lines: "You adore Larentina, the public harlot,¹² among the Junos, Cereses, and

¹¹ Tertullian, *Apology*, 14.

¹² It is worth remarking on the fact that the Romans did not conceal Aca Larentia's status as a "prostitute of great renown in that time (*nobilissimum id temporis scortum*)". Cf. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1, 10, 13.

Dianas."¹³ We can see in passages such as these the end of the legitimacy of ritual sacrifice,¹⁴ the epicenter of ancient religiosity, so as to grant all power to the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah, considered as the sole authentic messenger of the end of any other possible sacrifice.¹⁵ In one and the same gesture, the pagan gods are demoted to impostors and condemned for their moral and ontological imperfection.

Among Christian apologists, Tertullian is known for his especially incisive pen. In Lovecraft's eyes, he would be a mere amateur. The writer from Providence did not so much rehabilitate the pagan past of humanity as he attempted to uncover forbidden rites unaccounted for in any ancient document or monument. For Lovecraft, the most ancient religion—and also the truest—that humanity has ever conceived is, at the same time, the destruction of all religion. The restoration of Myth means the end of any mythology in which gods still have some anthropomorphic trait, some care for Humanity, or any supra-sensible constitution. In Lovecraft's eyes, what Humanity worships as gods are but obscure personifications of cosmic Races that populate the infinite universe, that colonized the Earth, and that, soon, will reclaim their Kingdom, bringing about the end of the human species.

No sacrifice ever recorded could as be bloody, grisly, and ruthless as the prehistoric rituals that still go on today in lost woods, remote mountains, or the most recondite islands. Humanity's religious impulse is but a means of communication with the extra-cosmic species that once lived on the Earth and still inhabit its hidden crannies, awaiting the moment of their return. Lovecraft's beings know nothing of human pity or law (which

¹³ Tertullian, *op. cit.*, 13.

¹⁴ The bibliography on ancient sacrifice is extremely abundant. On consagrations, *sacratio*, and sacrifice, cf. Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, 318-490. For an erudite panorama, also cf. Olivier Reverdin and Jean Rudhardt, *Le Sacrifice dans l'Antiquité*.

¹⁵ A Christian apologetic interpretation (spread here and there among contemporary interpreters) that does not coincide, however, with the historical reality of late Antiquity and the history of religions, beginning with Christianity itself. Cf. Guy Stroumsa, *La Fin du sacrifice. Les mutations religieuses de l'Antiquité tardive*.

does not mean that human life is but an engineering of things marked by decline and an esoteric center of

From this potentially inhuman, partial consideration, cosmic man life. The Myth any mythology (sacred place, preferred or origin of the indomitable the Lovecraftian Myth *si humanitas non daretur*

The Mythos has the ominous power for example, the "Antarctica, as Lovecraft's Mountains of Madness pious species that civilization, or are they part?"

Despite the false originality of the true initiate, we can ultra-terrestrial paleontological literature, from clues are provided. He mentions William of Lemuria in place.¹⁷ What element

¹⁶ From this perspective "HPL and HPB: Lovecraft

¹⁷ Lovecraft himself specifies. Smith, he declares: "I've ground or source material modern occultists & the"

does not mean that they do not have their own laws); for them, human life is but an accident of cosmic chance or of the genetic engineering of the Great Old Ones; its destiny is inevitably marked by decline before the incomparable forces hidden in the esoteric center of the world.

From this point of view, Lovecraftian mythology is essentially inhuman, para-human, trans-human, not having the least consideration, cosmological, ethical, or socio-political, for human life. The Mythos coincides perfectly with the annihilation of any mythology (sacred or profane) that praises or even grants a place, preferred or marginal, to the human subject in the becoming of the indomitable mass of a transfinite universe. Implacably, the Lovecraftian Mythos demands of us to consider a cosmos *ac si humanitas non daretur*.

The Mythos has sacred places in the terrestrial sphere where the ominous power of extra-human forces has its seat. Consider, for example, the "Titanic blocks" built by the Great Old Ones in Antarctica, as Lovecraft presents them in his story "At The Mountains of Madness". Do these demented cities and the impious species that inhabited them have some source, some inspiration, or are they instead complete inventions on Lovecraft's part?

Despite the fact that there are those who defend the absolute originality of the Mythos and even claim that Lovecraft was a true initiate, we can show that his fantastic archeology and his ultra-terrestrial paleontology have their precedents in theosophical literature, from which he clearly took inspiration.¹⁶ Some clues are provided along the way by the author himself, as when he mentions William Scott-Elliot's book on the legendary continent of Lemuria in passing in "The Call of Cthulhu", for example.¹⁷ What elements of the Mythos can we find in this book?

¹⁶ From this perspective, the most informed study is that of Robert Price, "HPL and HPB: Lovecraft's Use of Theosophy".

¹⁷ Lovecraft himself speaks eloquently to this point. In a letter to Clark Ashton Smith, he declares: "I've been digesting something of vast interest as background or source material [...] i.e., the Atlantis-Lemuria tales, as developed by modern occultists & the[o]sophical charlatans."

Supposedly inspired by the "astral voyages" of Charles Webster Leadbeater,¹⁸ the book is presented as a geological, historical, and biological proof of the existence of intelligent life before the evolutionary appearance of humans. One of the key aspects of this book, which in all likelihood stimulated Lovecraft's enthusiasm, is that it asserts the existence of geographically lost worlds (such as Lemuria, perished in a volcanic catastrophe) that harbored the ancient inhabitants of the Earth.

First and foremost, Scott-Elliot sets out from the postulate that these beings were not exactly humans: "Indeed, Lemurian man, during at least the first half of the race, must be regarded rather as an animal destined to reach humanity than as human according to our understanding of the term."¹⁹ Just as Lovecraft eventually did, Scott-Elliot goes on to speak of Great Races that inhabited the Earth before the arrival of humanity. Their bodies were not made of matter: "Thus the bodies of the First Root Race in which these almost mindless beings were destined to gain experience, would have appeared to us as gigantic phantoms—if indeed we could have seen them at all, for their bodies were formed of astral matter. The astral forms of the First Root Race were then gradually enveloped in a more physical casing. But though the Second Root Race may be called physical—their bodies being composed of ether—they would have been equally invisible to eyesight as it at present exists."²⁰

Moreover, just as in Lovecraft's works, neither the development nor the extension of the biosphere of the specimens of ancient Races were limited to the planet Earth: "the highest development which the type had so far reached was the huge ape-like creature which had existed on the three physical planets, Mars, the Earth and Mercury in the Third Round."²¹ In Scott-

Elliot's fantastic story, the cosmic dissemination, and the human body. "From evolved the Third—the material, being composed constitute the three lower [...] It was not until the [...] developed a solid bony structure

Again, coinciding with the development of the human body, Scott-Elliot of these ancient inhabitants of the Earth, probably the proof of an unknown development was gigantic, somewhere skin was very dark, being the same time, the ancient form of a biological involution, that the racism that permeated some of the graded remnants of the Earth may be recognised in the Tasmanian Islanders, some Fuegians, and the Bushmen

As other theosophists Ernst Haeckel's work in genetics from the (*Entwicklungsgeschichte*), level as at the morphological Haeckel's reproductive from the Gastrea to Pit

¹⁸ Scott-Elliot's book attempts to build on foundations that the author declares to be "scientific." Conversely, the "clairvoyant" version of the problem of Atlantic civilization can be found in Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater, *Man, Whence, How and Whither. A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation*, 126-133.

¹⁹ William Scott-Elliot, *The Story of Atlantis and The Lost Lemuria*, 20.

²⁰ Scott-Elliot, *op. cit.*, 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 23. Among many others "gelatinous green immensity Cthulhu" in *The Call of Cthulhu*.

²⁴ Scott-Elliot, *op. cit.*, 28.

²⁵ He is of special importance and, ultimately, on Lovecraft's (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*).

Elliot's fantastic story, the Lemurian Race emerged from this cosmic dissemination, and, later, the materiality of the specifically human body: "From the Etheric Second Race, then, was evolved the Third—the Lemurian. Their bodies had become material, being composed of the gases, liquids and solids which constitute the three lowest sub-divisions of the physical plane [...] It was not until the middle of the Lemurian period that man developed a solid bony structure."²²

Again, coinciding with aspects that Lovecraft would eventually develop, Scott-Elliot mentions in particular the gigantic size of these ancient inhabitants of the Earth. Describing a man of a sub-race, probably the fifth, Scott-Elliot submits the (false) proof of an unknown document according to which "his stature was gigantic, somewhere between twelve and fifteen feet. His skin was very dark, being of a yellowish brown colour."²³ At the same time, the ancient Lemurians still survive on the earth in the form of a biological involution whose catalogue shows, in passing, that the racism that will later be found in Lovecraft also permeated some of the period's theosophical works: "the degraded remnants of the Third Root-Race who still inhabit the Earth may be recognised in the aborigines of Australia, the Andaman Islanders, some hill tribes of India, the Tierra-del-Fuegians, and the Bushmen of Africa."²⁴

As other theosophists had already done, Scott-Elliot reused Ernst Haeckel's work as needed, developing a fantastic biogenetics from the latter's "history of development (*Entwicklungsgeschichte*)", as much at the individual (phylogenetic) level as at the morphological (ontogenetic).²⁵ For example, Haeckel's reproductive theories and his hypothetical organisms, from the *Gastrea* to *Pithecanthropus alalus*, were conveniently rein-

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 23. Among many other possible examples, the reader may refer to the "gelatinous green immensity" of the great Cthulhu mentioned in "The Call of Cthulhu" in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, 167.

²⁴ Scott-Elliot, *op. cit.*, 28.

²⁵ He is of special importance for his influence in the history of Theosophy and, ultimately, on Lovecraft himself. Cf. *The History of Creation (Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte)*.

terpreted as proof of the existence of the Third Race of Lemuria. It is certainly no coincidence that Lovecraft was also an admirer of Haeckel, although his use of the theories in his stories was quite different.

Likewise, the colossal, mountainous nature of the architecture attributed by Lovecraft to the Great Old Ones and the Ancient Races is also found in Lemurian structures: "During the later part of the sixth, and the seventh sub-race [the Lemurians] learnt to build great cities. These appear to have been of cyclopean architecture, corresponding with the gigantic bodies of the race. The first cities were built on that extended mountainous region of the continent which included the present island of Madagascar."²⁶

However, Scott-Elliot was merely walking in the footsteps of his mentor Helena Blavatsky, who had already set out the doctrine of Great Races, claiming that giants were not merely a theological fiction of history.²⁷ Along these lines, Blavatsky repeatedly cited the *Book of Enoch* and even Philo of Alexandria and his ethico-ontological anthropology, with its allegorical interpretation of giants that do not know "right reason" (*orthos logos*).²⁸ In fact, Blavatsky announces: "our races have sprung from Divine Races."²⁹ On this point, the antecedents turn out to be innumerable, from the Indian Rishis or Pitris to the Egyptian Thoth, from Oannes-Dagon up to the Lemurians: in Blavatsky's mythology, these beings "appear first as 'gods' and Creators; then they merge in nascent man, to finally emerge as 'divine-Kings and Rulers'."³⁰

²⁶ Scott-Elliot, *op. cit.*, 37. In "The Call of Cthulhu," Lovecraft similarly describes Cthulhu's city as "vast angles and stone surfaces—surfaces too great to belong to any thing right or proper for this earth, and impious with horrible images and hieroglyphs" (165).

²⁷ Cf. also Rudolf Steiner, *Cosmic Memory. Prehistory of Earth and Man*, 38, 80 *et seq.* Steiner prolonged the theses of Blavatsky and Scott-Elliot, and his work could well have been known to Lovecraft in some of its preliminary versions before the composition of the "great tales".

²⁸ Philo of Alexandria, *On the Giants (De gigantibus)*, 17.

²⁹ Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 365. Against Blavatsky, cf. René Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*.

³⁰ Blavatsky, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 366.

Closely associated with the Atlantis legend presented in the *Atlantis* by Jaccoliot: "whatever the civilization more ancient than the Roman, Greek or Egyptian, it is certain that this civilization has a scientific interest to find in the study of the things they may be. Others will study the sciences. As for us, we will go to the philological traditions that have been handed down on this question, which seem to be the remains of an ancient civilization, of which I am certain."³¹

Blavatsky postulates the discovery of some historical evidence to discover the true provenance (even if it is evoked). Ultimately, these beings lived before humans and their life was a supposed harmony with the universe. The "completed" natural history of the successive Races that precedes the present ages.

This scientific aspect of the study of the remains of geologists and prehistorians, all the theosophical so-called "archaeology" find a Lovecraftian echo in the English geologist who wrote *Mythical Monsters* sparked

³¹ Louis Jaccoliot, *Histoire des*

³² Among the important geological essays of Lovecraft, we must mention "The Great Old Ones," who, in 1908, had announced his idea to his theory of continents to which Lovecraft had preferred Alfred Wegener, *The Continents and Oceans*. Cf. *Something on the Doorstep and Other*

Closely associated with the Lemurian myth, we can find the Atlantis legend presented in terms close to Lovecraft's interests by Jacolliot: "whatever the place where a civilization more ancient than the Roman, Greek, Egyptian, or Indian developed, it is certain that this civilization has existed, and that it is of great scientific interest to find its footsteps, faint and fugitive though they may be. Others will study and weigh the geological possibilities. As for us, we will gather and compare all the religious and philological traditions that we have been able to find as concerns this question, which seems to us closely related to an antediluvian civilization, of which the Hindu has been the direct descendant."³¹

Blavatsky postulates, just as Lovecraft will later do, the need to discover some *historical reality* behind myths of the most diverse provenance (even if at times the allegorical method is invoked). Ultimately, these myths narrate the history of intelligent life before humans and the very origin of humanity, and do so in a supposed harmony with Darwinian findings. Darwinian science is "completed" thanks to the contributions of the sacred-natural history of theosophical esoterism and the doctrine of successive Races that populated the globe in the most remote ages.

This scientific aspect of Myth is important, since the writings of geologists and paleobiologists of the time are included in all the theosophical sources.³² In that regard, how can we not find a Lovecraftian echo in some pages of Charles Gould, the English geologist who died in Uruguay in 1893, whose book *Mythical Monsters* sparked the curiosity of the Theosophical Socie-

³¹ Louis Jacolliot, *Histoire des Vierges. Les peuples et les continents disparus*.

³² Among the important geologists known from early on and defended by Lovecraft, we must mention John Joly's *The birth-time to the world and other scientific essays*. Lovecraft was also aware of the theories of Frank Bursley Taylor, who, in 1908, had announced to the Geological Society of America the precursor idea to his theory of continental drift. That is why it is mentioned in a book to which Lovecraft had precise references, at least: the work of the great geologist Alfred Wegener, *The Origin of Continents and Oceans (Die Entstehung der Kontinente und Ozeane)*. Cf. Lovecraft, "At the Mountains of Madness," in *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Tales*, 306.

ty and, we could perhaps conjecture, Lovecraft himself? In a passage on the antiquity of humans, Gould wrote: "Comparatively recent—comparatively, that is to say, with regard to the vast æons that preceded them, but extending back over enormous spaces of time when contrasted with the limited duration of written history,—they embrace the period during which the mainly existing distribution of land and ocean has obtained, and the present forms of life have appeared by evolution from preceding species, or, as some few still maintain, by separate and special creation."³³

The "eons" that geologists dealt in were Lovecraft's preferred temporal currency.³⁴ Also, the idea of the transmigration of consciousness across species, a fundamental element of the Lovecraftian theory of the subject that, as we will see, is to be found in "The Shadow Out of Time", definitely derives from Theosophical propositions. In fact, Scott-Elliot refers to the simian bodies that remained after the arrival of the "wave of human life" onto the Earth in the Fourth Round and postulates that "their bodies may not then have been absolutely discarded; they may have been utilized for purposes of reincarnation for the most backward entities."³⁵ Without a doubt, based on these sources, Lovecraft assembled one of the most frightening theories of the subject to have been conceived in the twentieth century.

Furthermore, the mythical *Book of Dzyan*, the source that is at the origin of all the speculations of Helena Blavatsky and the entire circle of Theosophy is directly cited by Lovecraft among

³³ *Mythical Monsters*, 87. Also cf. Charles Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man with remarks on theories of the origin of species by variation*. And for the antecedents of Cthulhu, one must refer to a book known to Lovecraft, Alexander Winchell's *Sketches of Creation: A Popular View of Some of the Grand Conclusions of the Sciences in Reference to the History of Matter and Life*. This last title is explicitly cited in Lovecraft's "Commonplace Book", in *Collected Essays* vol. 5, 221.

³⁴ So important is this temporal measure that it appears in one of the couplets cited by Lovecraft as having been found in the mythical and feared book *Necronomicon* in "The Call of Cthulhu". On the *Necronomicon*, cf. Daniel Harms and John Wisdom Gonce III. *The Necronomicon Files*.

³⁵ Scott-Elliot, *op. cit.*, 21.

the "dreaded repository of formulae which have been the days of man's youth" in his story "The Book of Dzyan" where Blake finds the vol interior.³⁶ The reference to "Alonzo Typer", who lived a million years ago, in the *Book of Dzyan* and "Lords of Venus" (

Contemporary gate the possible s Madame Blavatsky the most promising Scholem, who maintains the famous stanzas of Madame H. P. Blavatsky based, owe something pages of the Zohar Scholem's quite precise source through which Jewish religious beliefs which contains a list of Blavatsky's knowledge of declares it herself in

Along with the used a good number points of reference from the *Liber investitus*

³⁶ Lovecraft, "The Hound of Hound Stories", 344.

³⁷ Lovecraft and William in the Museum and Other Re-

³⁸ Gershom Scholem, *Mag-*

³⁹ Christian Knorr von *transcendentalis et metaphysica*

⁴⁰ This book is mentioned on the Doorstep and Other W-

the "dreaded repositories of equivocal secrets and immemorial formulae which have trickled down the stream of time from the days of man's youth, and the dim, fabulous days before man was" in his story "The Haunter of the Dark", when the character Blake finds the volume in the vestry library while exploring the interior.³⁶ The references all come together in "The Diary of Alonzo Typer", which mentions the existence of Lemurians fifty million years ago, and emphasizes that the first six chapters of the *Book of Dzyan* predate the Earth, being already old when the "Lords of Venus" came to civilize our planet.³⁷

Contemporary scientific criticism has continued to investigate the possible sources of this mythological text created by Madame Blavatsky and later fictionalized by Lovecraft. One of the most promising hypotheses was advanced by Gershom Scholem, who maintained that "there can be little doubt [...] that the famous stanzas of the mysterious *Book of Dzyan* on which Madame H. P. Blavatsky's *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*, is based, owe something, both in title and content, to the pompous pages of the Zoharic writing called *Sifra-Di-Tseniutha*."³⁸ Scholem's quite plausible hypothesis also indicates a direct source through which Blavatsky could have come to know the Jewish religious book, that is, *Kabbala Denudata* (1677-1684) which contains a Latin translation of *Sifra-Di-Tseniutha*.³⁹ Blavatsky's knowledge of *Kabbala Denudata* is indisputable, since she declares it herself in her *Isis Unveiled* (1877).

Along with theosophically inspired sources, Lovecraft also used a good number of texts (many times, probably, only as points of reference for the composition of fiction) that range from the *Liber investigationis* of pseudo-Geber⁴⁰ to treatises on

³⁶ Lovecraft, "The Haunter of the Dark", in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, 344.

³⁷ Lovecraft and William Lumley, "The Diary of Alonzo Typer", in *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions*, 303-322.

³⁸ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 398-399.

³⁹ Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudata seu doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica*, vol. II, 347-385.

⁴⁰ This book is mentioned in "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" (in *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*). As scholars have pointed out, in this case

demonology like Remigius' *Daemonolatreia*.⁴¹ Likewise, there is no doubt that for the recreation of "a frightful and clandestine system of assemblies and orgies"⁴² such as are to be found in some of his writings, Lovecraft took inspiration from Margaret Murray's book on the witch-cult, as he himself mentions.⁴³ Beyond the "effects of erudition" that Lovecraft sought with these references, what is important here is that they involve a transformation in the traditional understanding of philological science.⁴⁴

It is also highly probable that Lovecraft knew the Hollow Earth myth, and therefore the sacred geography of the mythological cities of Agartha and Shambhala.⁴⁵ As for Agartha, it is a

Lovecraft joined two independent titles, *De Investigatione Perfectionis* and *Liber Fornacum*.

⁴¹ Nicholas Remy (Remigius), *Daemonolatreia libri tres*. This book is mentioned in "The Festival", in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, 112. Lovecraft also refers to Martín Del Río, *Disquisitionum Magicarum Libri Sex*. He seems to have become familiar with this last book, mentioned in "The Horror at Red Hook" (in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, 135), through the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In "The Nameless City" (in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, 34), Lovecraft also singles out the work of Gauthier Metz among books bearing demoniacal knowledge. However, the reference lacks foundation in the true content of the book, which Lovecraft came to know through its appearance in Sabine Baring-Gould's *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, 253. Baring-Gould, unlike the use Lovecraft makes of her, bases herself on Metz's text to establish the legendary location of the earthly paradise "in an impenetrable region of Asia." However, see Gauthier Metz, *L'image du monde* (circa 1246). Metz's book is based in turn on Honorius Augustodunensis. In the same story in which Gauthier Metz appears, Lovecraft mentions the "apocryphal nightmares" of Damascius, of which fragments are conserved in Photius' *Bibliotheca*. These are cited by the writer from Providence in his "Commonplace Book" (*Collected Essays*, vol. 5, *op. cit.*, 226) though we do not know with any certainty how Lovecraft came upon this last reference.

⁴² Lovecraft, "The Horror at Red Hook", 121.

⁴³ Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*.

⁴⁴ A complete list of the scholarly sources (real or imagined) mentioned by Lovecraft is found in the fundamental study by Lin Carter, "H.P. Lovecraft: the books [as annotated by Robert M. Price and S.T. Joshi]" in Darrell Schweitzer (ed.), *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, 107-147.

⁴⁵ Our writer probably encountered the legend of Shambhala through the theosophical literature. The city is mentioned by Lovecraft in "The Diary of Alonzo Typer" with the spelling "Shamballah." Of course, this theosophical literature is based in a tradition that goes back at least to the Renaissance and that we

city hidden beneath the Earth's surface, governed by a sovereign pontiff, the Brahmatma, of Ethiopian origin and almost supernatural configurations. One of the sources that consistently underlie this myth in the West points out: "on the surfaces and in the entrails of the Earth, the real extension of Agartha defies the grasp and constraint of profanation and violence. Not to speak of America, whose unknown subsurfaces belonged to it in remotest antiquity. In Asia alone, around half a billion men more or less know of its existence and size. But not one traitor will be found among them who will point out the precise location where its Council of God and its Council of the Gods, its pontifical head and court of law, are to be found."⁴⁶

Indeed, this description bears an interesting resemblance to the hidden city—"sacred spot" as Lovecraft puts it—in Antarctica that the explorers discover in "At the Mountains of Madness". The idea probably has its inspiration in Agartha. Likewise, when the protagonists of this story find the bas-reliefs and bookshelves of the ancient civilization of the Great Old Ones, they describe them as "racks for the hinged sets of dotted surfaces forming their books."⁴⁷ Also, in "The Shadow Out of Time," we see references to libraries that contain "volumes of texts and pictures holding the whole of earth's annals—histories and descriptions of every species that had ever been or that ever would be, with full records of their arts, their achievements, their languages, and their psychologies."⁴⁸ There are unavoidable parallels with the library of Agartha, about which D'Alveydre writes: "the libraries that contain the true body of all the ancient arts

cannot trace here. Other authors, such as Jules Verne, had also explored this route. It is enough to recall, for example, his *Voyage au centre de la Terre* from 1864.

⁴⁶ Saint-Yves D'Alveydre, *Mission de l'Inde en Europe. Mission de l'Europe en Asie. La question du Mahatma et sa solution*, 28. Lovecraft himself writes in "The Whisperer in Darkness": "They've been inside the earth, too—there are openings which human beings know nothing of [...] and great worlds of unknown life down there; blue-litten K'n-yan, red-litten Yoth, and black, lightless N'kai. It's from N'kai that frightful Tsathoggua came."

⁴⁷ Lovecraft, "At the Mountains of Madness", 302.

⁴⁸ Lovecraft, "The Shadow Out of Time" in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, 351.

and sciences from five hundred fifty-six centuries ago are not accessible to any profane gaze or attack. They may only be found in the entrails of the earth."⁴⁹

D'Alveydre's book was itself not lacking in precedents⁵⁰ and it would be later famously proven true by the (later discredited) expedition of the Polish scientist Ferdinand Ossendowski⁵¹, who relied on René Guénon's credulity. Guénon also wrote on Agartha, considering it on a plane more symbolic than real.⁵² Agartha's history is inseparable from the corresponding history of Shambhala, as Raymond Bernard continually indicates.⁵³

That Lovecraft obtained these sources from Theosophy does not in the least imply that his interpretation remained within the bounds imposed by the source material. Quite to the contrary. Not only did the theosophical approach have a "spiritualist" tendency alien to Lovecraft's universe, but it was also oriented around a fundamentally anthropic desideratum: in Theosophy all the cosmic forces, all the Races, all the stellar beings are placed in the service of anthropogenesis and its explication. In other words, in Theosophy the cosmogony is a form of intelli-

⁴⁹ D'Alveydre, *op. cit.*, 35.

⁵⁰ Louis Jacolliot, *Le Fils de Dieu*.

⁵¹ Ferdinand Ossendowski, *Beasts, men and gods*.

⁵² Raymond Bernard, *Agartha. The Subterranean World*. René Guénon, *The King of the World*. From the beginning of his book, Guénon supports Ossendowski's expedition and enters into the exegesis of what he considers, following the Polish explorer, to be the "mystery of mysteries" concerning sacred royal power.

⁵³ On the history of the two cities and the historical construction of their mythology, Joscelyn Godwin's book is fundamental today: *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival*. It is interesting to recall here that many of the Theosophical as well as Lovecraftian themes discussed in this chapter have been prolonged in Latin American writers such as, for example, the explorer and Chilean Neo-Nazi diplomat Miguel Serrano, who built up a good deal of his oeuvre on this mythological edifice. Cf. for example *Ni por mar ni por tierra*, 18: "the voyage that began here would end in the ice of Antarctica, in search of the mysterious primordial oasis." Or 142: "Lemuria was not destroyed by water, but by fire. The volcanoes vomited their lava, and fiery torrents buried the effigies and temples [...] The Titans of the moon were androgynous. Only fire could shatter the unity and separate the sexes [...] Atlantis and our current Earth were and shall be destroyed in the same way."

gent design destined to fuse itself, point for point, with anthropology. Nothing could be further from the Lovecraftian perspective.

For the writer from Providence, "we must ever recall that space has no boundary; that the illimitable reaches of vacancy extend endlessly out beyond our sight or comprehension, perhaps beyond the apparently infinite region of the luminiferous ether and beyond control of the laws of motion and gravitation. What mind can venture to depict those remote realms where form, dimensions, matter, and energy may all be subject to undreamt-of modification and grotesque manifestations? All that we know, see, dream, or imagine, is less than a grain of dust in infinity. It is virtually nothing, or at best no more than a mathematical point."⁵⁴

So it's clear: whereas Theosophy sought to enthrone humanity and its powers, Lovecraft's philosophy finds nothing but a subject that merely coincides with a mathematical point, and, as such, accedes to the plenitude of its insignificance. We can deduce that its inexistence would change nothing in the order of the universe, just as, *mutatis mutandis*, its existence may only be attributed to a meaningless chance event. And the Earth is the occult seat of cosmic Races carrying on a hidden civil war in the entrails of the globe, waiting for the right moment to once more take control of the surface of the planet until they have completely consumed it, abandoning it to its inevitable destiny of destruction.

The possibility of infinite, juxtaposed worlds had been conceived since the times of Anaximander; however, in this case the Earth only plays a contingent and fleeting role. It is not even, as Anaximander thought, due to a fault or injustice (*adikia*) linked to an offence that the universe will disappear, but simply as the operation of the natural processes of becoming. That is why the radicality of his intention remained limited to the idea of the multiplicity of worlds and perpetual new beginnings. In Anaximander, there is no absolute extinction, since his juridical-economic conception presupposed a perpetual event of punish-

⁵⁴ Lovecraft, "Time and Space" in *Collected Essays*, *op. cit.*, 30-31.

ment. Life would only be extinguished so as to be able to be punished in a new rebirth. Death annulled the sentence. A new birth was necessary for the resumption of the ritual of guilt and punishment.

Nothing of the sort in Lovecraft.⁵⁵ In his transfinite worlds only the silence of final death awaits, and the description of any possible world is beyond the laws known to the most exalted physics. That is why the cities of the Theosophists, his initial sources of inspiration, are quickly relegated to the catalog of the ephemeral: "Here sprawled a palaeogean megalopolis compared with which the fabled Atlantis and Lemuria, Commoriom and Uzuldaroum, and Olathoë in the land of Lomar are recent things of today—not even of yesterday; a megalopolis ranking with such whispered pre-human blasphemies as Valusia, R'lyeh, Ib in the land of Mnar, and the Nameless City of Arabia Deserta."⁵⁶ Here blasphemy defines the possibility of beings that, arriving from beyond time and space, build forms of life that negate Humanity on the Earth, societies beyond the social and temporalities beyond Time.

That is why the rites invoked by Lovecraft in stories such as "The Festival" are of necessity situated in a terrain beyond any possible ethnology. As the writer himself points out, he attempts to approximate a sort of rite "older than man and fated to survive him."⁵⁷ In this sense, all ethnology is essentially anthropological inasmuch as it presupposes that rites are of *human* origin and are to be explained through the laws that undergird collective life. In the case of Lovecraftian rites, however, there is no possible ethnology, since their cosmological reach places their origin and efficacy in a stage of Earth when *Homo sapiens* had not yet walked on its surface—when life as we know it today (or

⁵⁵ On the previous point, cf. the seminal and decisive study by Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*, 367). Also, on the meaning of the plurality of worlds, one must refer to Olof Gigon, *Der Ursprung der Griechischen Philosophie*, 66: "Der Ursprung ist ein einziger, aber Welten wie die unsrige gibt es noch unzählige [the origin is one alone, but there are infinite worlds like ours]".

⁵⁶ Lovecraft, "At the Mountains of Madness", 286.

⁵⁷ Lovecraft, "The Festival", 115.

as we can study it in its past as recognizable by science) had yet to awaken. Thus, it is an *arche-rite* but also an *ultra-rite* since, once the human race has disappeared, the ceremonies will be undertaken by other species, in other worlds.⁵⁸ This means honoring the powers that are destined to annihilate the cosmos itself, nourishing the forms of life that necessarily lead to the inertia of death.

From this point of view, ritualism has nothing specifically human about it. It is the form par excellence of a praxis exogenous to humans that they adopt, without knowing it, as their own form of constitution as social beings. Consequently, then, the social and its rites, in their formal aspect, are the inheritance and the most unsuspected trace of the fact that *societas* and *communitas* were not human inventions, and that human beings do nothing but clumsily duplicate gestures that precede them in cosmic time and space, but that will also outlive them when they are no longer on the face of the Earth. From the point of view of the Lovecraftian Mythos, a society is the most profoundly inhuman form that humans have found to organize their life together. It is the cipher that leads them once more to their origins beyond themselves, but this time within the strict scope of cosmological materialism.

Indeed, one of the most remarkable traits of Lovecraft's writing (although it obviously has its antecedents and followers) is the postulation of a historical philology, an archeological science, and a paleobiology that are all completely "fanciful" at first read. There is no doubt about their spurious nature (of which Lovecraft was entirely aware). However, this does not in the least solve the problem, but rather problematizes the legitimacy of philology—perhaps even more acutely than ever. What is the limit of what can be deduced from a historical document? It is

⁵⁸ Here even the concept of "species" loses all significance, since Lovecraftian rites tend to have, precisely, a component that undoes all boundaries between species to make biological fusions, metamorphoses and anamorphoses of all sorts, so much so that one could affirm that trans-speciation is one of the conditions of ritual efficacy just as it is one of its most insistently sought out goals. The problem of the fusion of species is presented with particular complexity in "The Shadow over Innsmouth."

precisely the Mythos that questions the traditional kinds of readings that philologists perform on ancient texts. There where philologists think they encounter mere beliefs, ideologies, or mythologemes, Lovecraft points out indices of existent realities, secret cults, and remote prehuman and cosmic inhabitants that preceded humanity in its wandering on the Earth.

In large part, Lovecraft adopts and radicalizes the gesture that had defined the science of ancient texts before the arrival of nineteenth-century German historical-critical philology (in which Gottfried Hermann and Karl Lachmann were two key figures), whose paradigm would largely come to be the model for the functioning of the discipline up until today. Transgression of these norms always paid a high price. It is enough merely to remember the polemic unleashed by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* by Willamowitz-Möllandorf (himself probably encouraged by Rudolf Schöll), accusing the then young Nietzsche of being an "apostle and metaphysician" and his theoretical proposals of "chimerical naiveté" and "insolence".⁵⁹

Clearly, beside Lovecraft's "fantastic philology," Nietzsche's propositions are reduced to the status of the prolixity of an unambitious positivist. So how is it possible that the philology invented by Lovecraft awakened such great adherence in its readers? The explanations are abundant, to be sure, but here we are only interested in what has to do with philology proper. If Lovecraft's fantastic philology turns out to be so attractive, this is no doubt due to two questions of the highest importance. First, he postulates a philology that is not a human science but a science of the infra- and supra-human cosmos. The documents and monuments that humans encounter are but the proof of their ontological insignificance. Lovecraftian philology is then a science possible only in a world where an infinite universe exists and is postulated. From that perspective, scientific philology still operates in the "closed universe" of the ancients.

⁵⁹ Willamowitz-Möllandorf, *Zukunftsphilologie! Eine Erwiderung auf Friedrich Nietzsches, Ord. Professors der Classischen Philologie zu Basel, "Geburt der Tragödie" von Ulrich von Willamowitz-Möllandorf, Dr. phil.*

The opening of philology to the potentialities disclosed by the infinite and transhuman nature of the universe—such are the heights to which Lovecraft aims to raise historical speculations. Certainly he only does this through falsification and fictionalization, but Lovecraft, we repeat, was conscious of this. He knew he was using these procedures as artifices of his writing. What we should retain is the challenge launched against philology. Is it possible to renew philology, setting out from a completely different understanding of the place of humanity in the cosmos?

The second issue is that Lovecraft's fantastic philology opens up the problem of a new understanding of politics and power. For example, let us take a classic motto defining sovereign power from the same period in which Lovecraft was writing his fictions. Around 1922, the jurist Carl Schmitt pronounced: "sovereign is he who decides the exception".⁶⁰ In our writer's work, sovereignty is a concept that is impossible to circumscribe within human space. The Great Races not only exercised power in the past, but they continue to do so in the present. From this point of view, all human power is temporarily delegated until the powerful cosmic races once again assume control and carry out the final leveling of the planet.

For example, the great Cthulhu continues to act on the human life-world, seeking the return of his kingdom: "[the great Cthulhu]... must have been trapped by the sinking whilst within his black abyss, or else the world would by now be screaming with fright and frenzy. Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men. A time will come."⁶¹ Humanity's power is not only contingent on the temporary character of its existence on Earth before the Sixth Extinction. Lovecraft also decisively states that power itself does not belong to humanity but to the Great Races that control cosmic secrets. In this sense power belongs purely to the natural capacities of the cosmos, to their outrageous unfolding in

⁶⁰ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5: "Souverän ist, wer über den Ausnahmezustand entscheidet" (*Politische Theologie*, 13).

⁶¹ Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu", 169.

dimensions beyond human comprehension. All human power is but a local modeling, precarious and vicarious, of the powers that rule the infinite universe, the source at which the Great Races have nourished their strength.

Once more, the lesson to be extracted from Lovecraft goes beyond his fabulous literary creations and their intergalactic stage. For the philosophy to come, we may retain the following propositions: 1) *power is intrinsically exogenous to human nature; its exercise by humanity is merely prosthetic*; 2) *power is an ontologically diluted local modeling of the natural powers of the cosmos*; 3) *humanity's ability to exercise power is only ontologically possible because of its inclusion in the cosmos and not as the result of an endogenous property*; 4) *a microphysics of power is inconceivable if it is not articulated with a macrophysics of power, understood as the unfolding of (in-)human dwelling in the abysses of an infinite universe*. Should these propositions be considered Lovecraft's legacy for a theory of power yet to be thought, we would be justified in maintaining that the writer from Providence has been one of the most provocative thinkers of the political of the twentieth century. His conception, however, was not written out *more geometrico* in the demonstrative language of theory, but in the folds of literary fiction as a *topos* to establish a diagram of thought. And so the *dominium mundi* does not belong to humanity. Humans only inhabit a planet that has been lent to them by chance in a universe to which they will never have access. The Mythos is but the extreme declaration of the human condition once all the veils of (post-)humanism have fallen.

Chapter Two

Oneirarchy and Geometries of the Infinite

Around 1900, well before (but close enough to when) Lovecraft began to write the fictions that make up the "great tale" cycle, came the publication of a summit of twentieth-century thought: *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud. "Puerile symbolism" was Lovecraft's description of this work by the great Viennese psychoanalyst. However, we should not underestimate the impact of this book on Lovecraft's oeuvre and the secret, obscure polemic he carried out with it until his last day. In a crucial moment of his argument, Freud invokes the authority of Virgil (*Aeneid* VII, 312); the poet says: "*flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*." However, the infernal regions to be moved here are the motions of the drives against the efforts of consciousness. The world of the old gods is reduced to a complex in which "compromise formations" (*Kompromißbildungen*) do their work, and where interpretation is the royal road of access to the patient's human, all too human unconscious.⁶²

Certainly such an approach to dreams could not satisfy Lovecraft.⁶³ But Freud's heretical disciple, Carl Gustav Jung, elaborated a theory of dreams that was in many ways closer, at least at first sight, to our author's preferences.⁶⁴ For Jung, the dream is above all the most pristine means of knowledge of the human *symbolizing* faculty. Freud himself had developed the idea of "archaic remains" (*archaische Überreste*), which Jung would take

⁶² Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 604 (*Die Traumdeutung*, 525).

⁶³ Lovecraft, "In Defense of Dagon", in *Collected Essays*, vol. 5: "I prefer to stick to a more fantastic kind of explanation of the dream-world than that offered by Prof. Dr. Sigmund Freud—only illusions and insolvable mysteries are really fascinating to the imagination" (52).

⁶⁴ On the influence of Jung on Lovecraft's writing, cf. Barton Levi St. Amand, *The Roots of Horror in the Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft*. Also stimulating (although I disagree with the author's conclusions) is Robert Price's "Jung and Lovecraft on Prehuman Artifacts".

over, making it fundamental for his theory of archetypes. These ancient vestiges, according to Jung, have a direct relation with the most ancient rites and myths. From this perspective, dreams, for Jung, have an only partially human origin, since they also depend on natural processes that he saw reflected in the mythologies of Antiquity or the fables of primitive forests.

As is known, Jung thought of the archetypes as a hereditary tendency of the human soul, allowing it to form representations of mythological motifs that, setting aside historical variations, all have a basic pattern. That is why there is a close relation between the archetypes and religious symbols, since both have the power to grant meaning to human life.⁶⁵ In all, the heritage contained in the archetypes belongs to the recapitulation of the entirety of *human* experience: "What Jung was proposing was a bold extension [...] beyond the individual's memory to encompass the memory of mankind. His supposition was that nothing that mankind had ever experienced was truly lost [...] The residues of past experiences had left behind their traces in the collective unconscious."⁶⁶

Lovecraft presents his notion of the archetypal dream at the beginning of "The Dunwich Horror" by means of an extensive, decisive epigraph from the English writer Charles Lamb: "Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimaeras—dire stories of Celaeno and the Harpies [...] are transcripts, types—the archetypes are in us, and eternal. [...] They date beyond body—or without the body, they would have been the same. . . . That the kind of fear here treated is purely spiritual [...] that it predominates in the period of our sinless infancy—are difficulties the solution of which might afford some probable insight into our ante-mundane con-

⁶⁵ Jung, "Symbolism and the Interpretation of Dreams." I have relied here on a text by Jung that, for chronological reasons, was not read by Lovecraft and that, in its current form, was only published *post-mortem* in his complete works. Given its systematic nature, however, I am authorized to use it for comparative purposes in explicating the mature form of the Jungian conception. For an interesting analysis of this conception, cf. Sonu Shamdasani, *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology: The Dream of a Science*, 100-162.

⁶⁶ Shamdasani, *op. cit.*, 233.

dition, and a peep at least into the shadowland of pre-existence."⁶⁷

First and foremost, the quote shows how Lovecraft was able to make his own a notion of archetype that not only had Jungian roots, but also drank from common wells, with the writer as well as the psychologist, since, as is known, as Lovecraft wrote the concept had a wide expanse in various fields of knowledge, from philosophy and literature to natural history (from Goethe to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire).⁶⁸ However, for the writer from Providence, the archetype refers back to a prehuman time—something that perhaps only the most extreme version of Jung could admit. For the psychologist, however, the modeling of the natural world by archaic humanity had a foundational role in the construction of archetypal symbolism. In Lovecraft, on the other hand, the archetype is completely *independent* of any human formulation. Strictly speaking it would have existed even if humanity had never emerged on Earth, and will continue to exist even after the extinction of the last hominid.

For the materialist that Lovecraft was, this possibility is given first and foremost by the existence of non-human life and intergalactic civilizations that preceded the arrival of humanity. Dream is the privileged locus for humans to encounter the most complete proof of those archaic civilizing stages before finding, as we see in the stories, the terrifying archeological ruins (which, of course, are not as efficient as dreams as far as the completeness of transmission). In this sense, the deepest ground of human dream is completely *non-human* (and is often *anti-human*, radically hostile) and is populated by factual proofs of the cosmic and paleobiological history of the Earth, and, beyond that, of the

⁶⁷ Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror", in *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, 206. Although Lovecraft does not provide the complete citation, it may be found in Lamb's "Witches and Other Night-Fears", in *The Prose Works*, vol. II, 154.

⁶⁸ For an extremely interesting discussion of the problem of archetype in its relation with analogy and homology in the context of natural history that in many ways transcends this field, cf. Richard Owen, *On the Archetype and Homologies of the Vertebrate Skeleton*, esp. 1-19.

universe itself. As we can see, Lovecraft's ambitions for dream content go far beyond the sources he set out from.

So, for example, in "The Dreams in the Witch-House", Walter Gilman, during his dream experiences, is compelled to "meet the Black Man, and go with them all to the throne of Azathoth at the centre of ultimate Chaos."⁶⁹ The reference to the Black Man could be compatible with Nyarlathotep, a messenger of the Great Old Ones who, according to the literary followers of the Mythos, is called to bring final destruction to the Earth. In any case, here dream acts as a pole completely unbound from the singular properties of the dreaming subject, or of any repressed traumatic content. The dream is not only a vehicle to a land that is autonomous with respect to the subject, but also and above all capable of leading the subject to remote zones of the cosmos, or the most recondite hiding places of the pre-human past. As such, dreams are the royal road to the true *universal* history that human consciousness has hidden for millennia.

Dreams are likewise a means used by various Lovecraftian entities to act on the human world, influencing its development, its actual micro-history. In this way dreaming also takes on a clearly political significance. Thus, in "The Call of Cthulhu", young Wilcox, "upon retiring [...] had had an unprecedented dream of great Cyclopean cities of titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths [announcing a] latent horror."⁷⁰ In fact, in this dream, a non-voice transmitted a sound to him; transliterated, it bore the following message: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."⁷¹ In this (as it were) inhuman couplet we see the method of the great Cthulhu in particular (and of the Great Old Ones generally), that is, the use of dreams as the means *par excellence* for non-human entities to influence humans.

⁶⁹ Lovecraft, "The Dreams in the Witch House", in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, 310.

⁷⁰ Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu", 143.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 150. In Lovecraft's transcription of the language of Cthulhu based on "the Louisiana swamp-priests" it reads: "Pb'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu / R'lyeh ugab'nagl fbtagn."

In Lovecraft's onto-biology, the Great Old Ones and the Outer Gods are incommensurable with human beings. In the world of dreams, however, a common ontological zone appears: the point where the most radically opposed beings (in terms of importance and difference of species) may coincide. This suggests that in Lovecraft's world dream is a trans-spatial and trans-temporal realm where all the beings of the cosmos may coincide in a common torpor. It is all as if dreaming were the *terra incognita* where all the forces of the cosmos act upon each other, showing the illusion borne by all space, all time, and all history, which are thereby all annihilated there. Such an *oneiric extraterritoriality*, however, is not a neutral or peaceful place; quite the contrary—many decisive battles for dominion of the cosmos unfold in its womb.

This is why great Cthulhu rules by means of a true *oneirarchy*, a dominion of humanity through dreams. The goal is to lead the priests of his cult when the stars are in the right position for the Great Old Ones to awaken and reclaim their mastery over the Earth: "The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy."⁷² Dreams also harbor, then, the powers of anarchy, and are the last political bastion on which the aspiration of all cosmic creatures rest—as well as the mixed-up desires of a humanity posited by Lovecraft as being in the final phase of its decadence.

When our writer raises the question of dreams, he relates it closely to spatial geometry and the temporal vector. In "The Dreams in the Witch-House," we learn of Gilman's mathematical studies: "Non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics are enough to stretch any brain [...] Gilman came from Haverhill, but it was only after he had entered college in Arkham that he began to connect his mathematics with the fantastic legends of

⁷² *Ibid*, 155. The references to the "state of nature" and Nietzsche are not coincidental, since Lovecraft knew philosophers such as Hobbes and Nietzsche well. This is amply demonstrated in his erudite (and sarcastic?) piece, unpublished in his lifetime, entitled "Some Causes of Self-Immolation", in *Collected Essays*, vol. 5, 77-84, especially 78. The Stirnerian filiation of this passage, which may certainly be through Nietzsche, cannot be ignored.

elder magic."⁷³ Indeed, this is immediately followed by a list of some writers on physics read by Gilman: Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein and de Sitter. As we can see, Lovecraft sometimes used mathematics as a method that formalized experiences specific to the magic that allowed one to enter into the secrets of the universe.

The exploration of the literary possibilities of physics was not solely Lovecraft's affair. Edwin Abbott Abbott's novel *Flatland*, for example, had already raised the problem of multi-dimensionality.⁷⁴ But the properly Lovecraftian gesture is to try and go beyond the limits that modern physics has established for its postulates. He wrote: "Any being from any part of three-dimensional space could probably survive in the fourth dimension [...] Time could not exist in certain belts of space, and by entering and remaining in such a belt one might preserve one's life and age indefinitely; never suffering organic metabolism or deterioration except for slight amounts incurred during visits to one's own or similar planes. One might, for example, pass into a timeless dimension and emerge at some remote period of the earth's history as young as before."⁷⁵

Trans-dimensional regions are also the precise hiding place of the most feared entities of the Lovecraftian universe: "somewhere beyond the galaxy, or in the spiral black vortices of that ultimate void of Chaos wherein reigns the mindless daemon-sultan Azathoth".⁷⁶ So the universe proposed by Lovecraft is absolutely infinite. That is why the laws of relativity can also be suspended and multi-dimensionality becomes conceivable, some of them without time. Time travel towards the past or future thus becomes completely viable and, then, the writer is allowed to challenge Einstein: "Do you know that Einstein is wrong, and that certain objects and forces *can* move with a velocity greater

⁷³ Lovecraft, "The Dreams in the Witch-House", 300-301.

⁷⁴ Edwin Abbott Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. Today it is important to consult the academic edition of this book, with the informative introduction by Thomas Banchoff, published by Princeton University Press in 2005.

⁷⁵ Lovecraft, "The Dreams in the Witch-House", 307, 322.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 329.

than that of light? With proper aid I expect to go backward and forward in time, and actually *see* and *feel* the earth of remote past and future epochs."⁷⁷

As a result, space as conceived here not only goes beyond the limits of physics but also harbors, as the fundamental condition of its abyssal mathematicity, the possibility of humanity's very destruction. Lovecraft wrote: "it was mostly a kind of force that doesn't belong in our part of space; a kind of force that acts and grows and shapes itself by other laws than those of our sort of Nature. We have no business calling in such things from outside, and only very wicked people and very wicked cults ever try to. [...] the beings they were going to let in tangibly to wipe out the human race and drag the earth off to some nameless place for some nameless purpose."⁷⁸

According to the basics of the Mythos, the cosmic laws discovered by modern physics, from Einstein to quantum mechanics, are only a possible fragment of the many laws that remain to be discovered in unimaginable zones of an infinite universe ruled by cosmic principles—principles so far completely unknown to human science.⁷⁹ In any case, the general theory of the Lovecraftian Mythos maintains an absolute interaction among all the regions of the infinite Cosmos, so that constant passages between universes and dimensions are not only a reality in the mythologeme but are also the root of all danger, since the Cosmos has ceased to have any friendly connotation for humanity. It is transformed into the source of humanity's annihilation as a species.

⁷⁷ Lovecraft, "The Whisperer in Darkness", in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, 248.

⁷⁸ Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror", in *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, 245.

⁷⁹ Lovecraft himself might have been surprised to learn that, today, some scientists, still in a minority, take up some of the problems he had foreseen. The postulate of the radicality of the Mythos can nevertheless be entirely upheld even before the new scientific horizons. Cf. Michio Kaku, *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension* and his *Beyond Einstein: The Cosmic Quest of the Theory of the Universe* as well as, more recently, *Physics of the Impossible: A Scientific Exploration into the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation and Time Travel*.

We see the same situation unfold in the Lovecraftian conception of the architecture of the cyclopean construction of the Great Old Ones. So, for example, upon arriving at the place where the great Cthulhu dwells: "as Wilcox would have said, the geometry of the place was all wrong [...] In this phantasy of prismatic distortion [the door] moved anomalously in a diagonal way, so that all the rules of matter and perspective seemed upset."⁸⁰ The Great Old Ones' city is described in a similar way: "a Cyclopean city of no architecture known to man or to human imagination [...] embodying monstrous perversions of geometrical laws."⁸¹ In fact, Lovecraft tried to go beyond non-Euclidean geometries so as to indicate the possibility of new geometrical laws, unknown to humanity, that govern not only vast other sectors of the unexplored cosmos but also the buildings that the ancient Races left buried in the bowels of the Earth.

Many times dreaming is the means of passage and the path to apprehending these spaces beyond the known universe and its dimensions. But what lesson may philosophy extract from the extreme literary experience proposed by the Lovecraftian Mythos? Just this: accepting as a challenge to thought what the Mythos dramatizes as realized possibility. In fact, beyond the fantastic contents of the Mythos, it is perhaps time for philosophy to once again consider that dreaming can go beyond the confines of symptoms and complexes. And at the same time that it can be the gateway to, not the constitutive archetype of what is human, but what is most foreign and non-human in the human.

This point of view may make it possible to think dreaming without making it the secret guardian of our identitarian dreams. Dreaming, Lovecraft challenges us to consider, is a *crack* in the human that opens onto worlds where the consciousness of classical philosophy cannot enter. It reveals that thinking is permeated, from beginning to end, by an other-than-itself. Perhaps the otherness of dreaming is a beyond of thinking and all its powers that the mere category of unconscious is not able to grasp, except in an inadequate manner. Even if language and image can

⁸⁰ Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu", 166-167.

⁸¹ Lovecraft, "At the Mountains of Madness", 271.

be its gateways, they are not its substance. Consequently *dream substance* may still hide secrets insufficiently explored by a metaphysics that has, from the earliest times, sought to exorcize its constitutive spectrality.

At the same time, Lovecraft conceived of an absolutely infinite universe. Here philosophy might intervene in the debate as to whether there is an absolutely infinite universe or, on the contrary, if it is limited to the scale of the observable universe. Through the Mythos, Lovecraft reminds us that it can still be philosophy's task to think the universe and its constitution. There is no reason for cosmology to be the exclusive patrimony of physical science. Philosophy can and should consider whether space is reducible to its schema in physics, or if other possibilities are conceivable based on, and beyond, the data available up to now.

In other times, and limiting ourselves only to the recent past, philosophy was matched against physics and mathematics on equal terms. It is not a coincidence that Kant challenged Newton⁸² and Bergson, Einstein.⁸³ Beyond the outcome of such disputes, what is important for me is to retrieve—and here Lovecraft is an example—the possibility of a cosmological philosophy, or, put otherwise, the *necessity* for metaphysics to return to the central problems of its history, from substance to subject, from the universe to the passions, overcoming the aporias of historicism and emerging from the trial which it underwent in the deconstructive stage of the twentieth century. The *Destruktion* of metaphysics only made it possible to get clear

⁸² On Kant and Newton, cf. Eric Watkins, "Kant on Extension and Force: Critical Appropriations of Leibniz and Newton", and also Michaela Massimi, "Why There are No Ready-Made Phenomena: What Philosophers of Science Should Learn From Kant".

⁸³ On this dispute, which continues to be crucial for understanding the course of contemporary philosophy, cf. Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*. The bibliography on the Bergson-Einstein controversy is copious. However, cf. Milic Capek, *Bergson and Modern Physics*; Hervé Barreau, "Bergson et Einstein". More recently, Elie During's study "Bergson et la métaphysique relativiste" is a key reference.

about how narrow its aims had become, but in no way announces its overcoming or abolition. A post-historicist metaphysics, capable of overstepping the barriers of the signifier, still awaits its moment.